

# ALBERTA NATIVE NEWS

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

APR 26 1990

## Human Rights Commission Condemns Treatment of Natives

by Brian Savage

Chief Commissioner Maxwell Yalden of the Canadian Human Rights Commission released his annual report with a plea for more action to combat the growing racism in Canada. Natives who end up living in "misery and hopelessness" were singled out for the highest importance.

Yalden condemns what he perceives as hypocrisy on the part of Canadians in their attitudes to human rights in other countries while ignoring rights abuses in their own land.

There are "too many noble declarations" about

*"If there is any single issue on which Canada cannot hold its head high in the international community, any single area in which we can be accused of falling down on our obligations, it is in this area of aboriginal relations."*

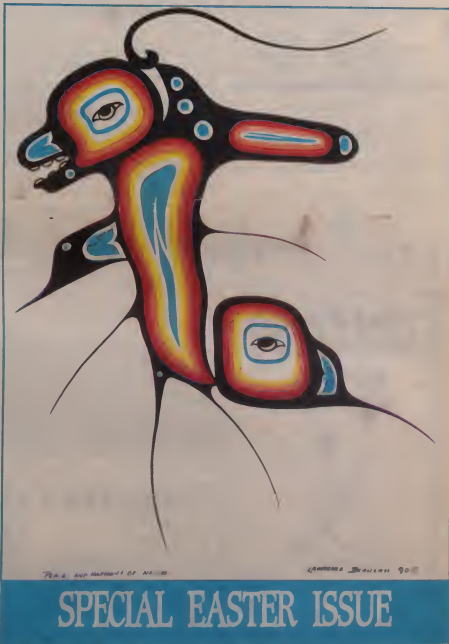
human rights, said the Commissioner, who called for a royal commission to look into the setting up of a Native justice system and Native self-government as well as the general condition of Native people.

Yalden was severe in his criticism of Canada, and, by implication, the Canadian government, in the failure to meet Native demands.

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Yalden noted that "by any standard, by any measure one can think of, the Native people of this country are at the bottom of the heap. Without a genuine commitment at the highest level, we don't see fundamental change."

Yalden called too many Canadians hypocritical



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in their approach to the growing racist issue in Canada, who instead are happy to hide behind patriotic speeches on Canada Day.

"We have our own human rights problems in this country," warned Yalden, whose commission

is responsible for monitoring all federal government departments, crown corporations, Indian bands, transportation companies and telecommunication, radio and television industries.



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## "I Will Not Cry . . . Alone"

by Ken Ward

As I walked towards the rally that was held at the Continental Inn in Edmonton, from my home at the Enoch Band Reserve, my thoughts focussed on my past, present and future.

Silence was numb, only my brother's footsteps sounded in unison with mine. I thought of my life and the special people who at some point in time have been a positive influence to me. Sometimes I would feel that I am a mass of spirits of representation of these people.

You see, I am a Native who's been diagnosed with HIV positive since December '89. Death is now my companion as it lingers with each day as it goes by. AIDS is not prejudice to anyone.

When I was hospitalized for a week and a half at the Charles Cammell Hospital, I experienced assorted feelings that one would in a lifetime. The hospital and I had to grow fast in patient's survival. It can be frightening for a Native to come into a hospital, diagnosed with a terminal illness and feel alone. The medicines may be updated, but emotional needs are left in the dark ages. I really want to stress that these nurses deserve recognition for my personal survival, and I wish to make it known that if I ever get sick or die, I wish to be at this hospital. Dignity is important to one's well-being.

Death to me is now, with my feelings and coping with life mentally which can be exhausting and frightening. No point in denial, acceptance helps me learn to live with the illness and eventually dying. My Grandfathers await and this will be my comfort.

For now I must seek the support of others that will help me to continue to live on. For this I chose to move into a residence that houses those with AIDS. Some wondered why I chose Karos House, since I have HIV. I want to understand, feel and live in the environment that I cannot ignore. Ignorance was what got me there in the first place. So why not face reality. It isn't easy sometimes . . . I feel helpless to make the fellow smile at times for their eyes would stare aimlessly into the living. We have to create our own happiness, no one else can. These fellows are my family members and, yes, I have felt their support when I was lost. Their words gave me strength.

You know, the way I figured this out, if the public at large would educate themselves - the understanding and caring would make a difference. You cannot get AIDS from touching, only from unsafe sex and dirty needles.

## Count On Us



Why did I choose to write to you? I am one of those individuals who was a youth worker, I worked in group homes, with Elders and with the mentally handicapped. They may be one of your family members, that I cared for and respected. I chose to invest my time with pride and faith in your people, our people. All I ask in return is some respect and dignity from you. That's all!

The Indian way of life can be so powerful. As I was handed the eagle feather from my grandmother at the rally I felt its power. Everyone has a moment in their life that makes it their history. This was mine to share with my family and the Indian Nation - to be proud of whom we are.

This illness is nothing to be proud of, nor am I ashamed of only part of the circle of my life cycle.

As I held this feather to the Great Spirit, I thought of another young man who is Native and HIV. His doctors recommended that he go on AZT, a drug that checks the infection, but it's not a cure. He refuses the drug, the care of others because of two major factors. His family, his partner and friends have washed their hands clean of his existence. He's alone and he chooses to die quickly. How cruel can some people be - only dogs receive this same treatment and the animal activists cry in anger. I shout for this brother and others across Canada.

Becoming public was my personal sacrifice to bring attention to our Elders, Indian politicians and professionals to deal with AIDS in the Native community.

Getting better in educating myself as a person with HIV, through the generous support of the AIDS Network of Edmonton, I have found some peace of mind, and once in a while, I still feel afraid. But it's okay to feel that, but deal with it too!

We don't need individuals who wish to seek personal recognition to enhance their position. But sincerity and dedication are prerequisites for this challenge. Education is needed, through the training at any AIDS programs near you. We must understand the medical, psycho-social issues and include our ways, our heritage. I would stress, working together is a must.

With this illness I can foresee the Native people dealing with our medical services/rights. Also, new projects will develop from AIDS. I am excited, for I too have some ideas that I would like to give. I only hope that there are not many of our brothers/sisters who have to die before these projects come into existence. I would like to be around and even see some operate.

For those who are afraid to be recognized, but have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, please call the AIDS Network and they will get in touch with me. Everything is in strict confidence. I, too, have cried alone.

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# PLAY REVIEW

## All-Native play staged at Chinook Theatre

*All My Relations*

Review by Ryan Edwards

*"It's hard times for those who forget."*

Those are the words spoken by the venerable and knowledgeable Granny, at the beginning of "All My Relations", a play written by local Native playwright Floyd Favel. The play ran, to favourable reviews, at Edmonton's Chinook Theatre from March 8th to 18th.

Favel also appeared in the cast of the play as George, a young man who is trying to strengthen his ties with his heritage, but who moves from the reserve to the city with his mother, Ernestine, and his sister, Anna. Although the rather odd Boniface — another of George's relations — also makes the move, Granny stays behind, with the admonition that "You're gonna lose yourself in that city."

Indeed, although George begins taking welding classes, his funding is cut off, and he begins spending a lot of his time in the city bars. He's joined by Genevieve, a woman also wise to the bar scene.

For her part, Anna does well in her university courses. However, Ernestine's health deteriorates to where she is wheelchair bound, although she still manages to get around to the bingo halls.

As the family's financial resources dwindle, George decides to open up the "All My Relations" agency, in which he will conduct tours to show people how urban Natives live. The end result, however, is that George realizes he is exploiting and betraying his own people.

It is in this bleak scenario that an old man enters to "call the buffalo". As the play ends, we realize that George has made a transformation, and a positive one.

During the play, the dialogue alternates between Cree and English, and the action switches easily from antic humour to a seriousness that stuns you squarely in the stomach. Playwright Favel also deftly weaves in a commentary upon the plight of Native people at the hands of white society. "If the buffalo came back,

where would they stay?" he has one of his characters ask.


Favel's pride in his own heritage and culture also comes through very strongly. Indeed, "All My Relations" is an affirmation of the durability of Native culture, despite all of the efforts of mainstream society to "assimilate" — and eradicate — Canada's original people. Hopefully, non-Native audiences will find

much that they can learn from the play.

Joining Favel in the cast are Tantoo Cardinal (whose credits include roles in the films "Loyalties" and "Divided Loyalties") as Granny; local actress Rhonda Cardinal as Anna; another local actress, Bertha Twin, as Ernestine; Toronto-based actress Pamela Matthews as Genevieve; and Manitoba actor Ronald Cook doubling as Boniface and the old man who called the buffalo. The play was directed by Allen MacInnis, with original music by Lance Tallfeathers.

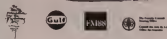

Following the Edmonton performances, the cast and encourage went on a tour of a number of Alberta communities, including Athabasca, Bonnyville, Fort McMurray and Lac la Biche. That tour was followed by performances in Winnipeg from April 7th to April 12th.

Floyd Favel was born on the Poundmaker Reserve in Saskatchewan, and his training has included a year and a half of study in Denmark at the Tjuk Teatret (a school comprised of Inuit, Sami and North American Indians), and two years of study in Italy under the famed Polish theatre director Grotowski. Based on the success of "All My Relations", Favel definitely has a bright future as a playwright ahead of him.




Catalyst Theatre Presents  
**ALL MY RELATIONS**

Written by Floyd Favel  
Directed by Allen MacInnis  
Designed by David Skelton and Kim McLean  
Original Music by Lance Tallfeathers




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From the opening pages of *Beedahbun: The First Light of Dawn*:

A new edition of the Stations of the Cross is no less surprising than a new love song. No one tires of the flowers in spring, of their delicate beauty and pristine fragility. Yes, some things grow in value as time goes by — good wine, a beautiful painting, the wisdom of an Elder. So it is with the Stations of the Cross. They possess a myriad of forms, a rich history, a cultural style often jealously guarded.

Yet, the Way of the Cross is not the way of the flick advertising campaign that try in vain to puff themselves up with a veneer of authenticity. No, only what is truly important to us remains part of our heritage; only what has lasting value is retained. Our homes are testaments to this, filled with comforting clutter; anything irrelevant soon lays discarded in the trash heap.

As a form of devotion, the Stations of the Cross have been part of the Church for a long time.

They are stations, places of halt. They denote an imperative: stop and think, spend some time on this mystery. A mystery situated with memory, challenging us to empathize with the divine-human person who loved enough to suffer and die for us.

Every Christian dreams of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but not every Christian has the wherewithal to get there. When devotion to the Passion of Christ became widespread in the 12th and 13th century, the veterans of the Crusades erected tableaux in their home countries to represent the various places

surrounding the last moments of Christ's life. Some of these moments were derived from scripture; others were derived from the poetry and tradition of the people.

The first composite Stations of the Cross fashioned outside of Palestine were erected at the Church of St. Stefano in Bologna in the 5th Century. However, they didn't come into general use until the 15th century.

Originally there was considerable variety in the number and titles of the Stations used, ranging from the five stations placed in the Bologna church, to seven in Antwerp, with sometimes as many as thirty or more in other locations. The number of falls often varied from one to seven. It was not until the 16th century that the fourteen traditional Stations as we now know them began to appear in devotional books and in churches.

In our post Vatican II Church, artists and mystics have continued to create new interpretations to this archetypal representation of the Love that doesn't back down, that doesn't quit. Many of them have added a fifteenth Station — "The Resurrection".

The purpose for this new book is threefold. The authors wish to offer you some new insights and spiritual nourishment from the Pascal mystery. We wish also to make this a practical example of inculturation, that is, the blending of the culture of a people (in this case, the Anishnabek People) and their Christian faith. As the sun rises on the Anishnabek Christian it sets on a stringent evangelical faith enforced with a European cultural empiricism. Finally, we wish to introduce you to Native art.

Therefore we present for your enjoyment and edification *Beedahbun: First Light of Dawn*, as seen through the penetrating talent of a young Native artist, Mr. Leland Bell. There is nothing to new as something old rediscovered.

The Anishnabek

It didn't quite happen the way that I might have expected. No, I was much more familiar with a guarded, maybe even pseudo-reverent approach to gift-giving. Most gifts bought by my parents were shown to me, prefaced with the remark, "Now don't touch that! You can look but mind you don't get too close." A gift that may be destined for someone very important would never have been shown to me at all. I would only have heard about those gifts, treated as sacred vessels which lay hidden in some sanctuary of safety (usually my mother's bedroom) until they could be given to the recipient.

It surprised me then that this was not the case with the handicrafts which the Ojibway People had made for Pope John Paul II when he visited Canada in September of 1984. Their gifts were a gift from the People, the Anishnabek (as they call themselves), they were in a very real sense the property of everyone. The whole community was the giver.

This innate spiritual quality of the People of Ojibway First Nation was brought home to me quite vividly one beautiful fall day. The students and teachers of Sacred Heart School, Espanola, Ontario, assembled in the school gym to see a special surprise. The Native Elders carried a box into the room with a certain informal ritual. We would be given the opportunity to see the gifts that had been prepared for the Pope.

Among them was the Eagle feather. The eagle is the thunderbird, the symbol of knowledge and direction, caretaker of First Nations. It is the bird that soars so high, it alone is capable of being the great messenger to God, hovering between all people and their Creator. On its wings, it carries the prayers and hopes of the people.

Pope John Paul II is also a messenger to the Great Spirit, a



giver of life. He too brings our prayers to God. He would be given an eagle feather as a symbol of this. This was the highest honour that the Native People could bestow upon him. Then the Elders explained, "Do you not also wish to have your prayers and your hopes brought to the good God? Don't you have some message that you want the Holy Father to bring to our loving Creator? Well, we will give you an opportunity. Think of a special prayer and then, when you come forward to view the gifts, pass your hand over the eagle feather. Yes, so when we give the feather to the Holy Father, your prayers will also be handed over to him."

It was a great lesson for me — and an effective one I hasten to add. A few weeks later, on September 15, 1984 as I watched the live television coverage of this historic meeting between Pope John Paul II and the Native People at the Marys Shrine in Midland, Ontario, I observed Elder Ernest Benedict present "our" eagle feather to the Pope. I was transfixed.

The cloudy day mixed with intermittent drizzle did not dampen the enthusiasm of those gathered on the hill overlooking Huronia. If anything, it instilled a feeling of closeness not unlike the traditional gathering together of the people that might well have taken place in a longhouse similar to the reconstructed model that the Pope had visited moments before.

Ernest Benedict, his hair adorned with long, meticulous braids reaching down and resting on his shoulders, approached the Pope. He did it with a pride and dignity which reached back to his great irrefutably indigenous traditions. A prayer shawl draped over his left arm, the eagle feather raised high in the air with his right hand, he began to speak in a prayerful, prophetic style exhibiting the confidence of a shaman.

"We who are sheltered by the great tree of peace have placed the eagle at the top of the tree. The eagle has great courage beyond any other creature and his travels are above us all. We believe that it is entirely fitting that this feather from the wings that have brushed against the sky, shall be awarded to you for your supreme courage and spiritual achievement. As you proclaim the heavenly message we remember that the Master has given his blood for the world. You also have shed your blood; that has been noted on the feather. These are my words."

All who watched were moved by the simplicity and power of these words. They were not hollow. On the contrary they seemed to possess a magnetic force, drawing different cultures to the centre of a bond held in common as if all that was unnecessary or dissonant was equally dissolvable. Moments like this can melt discord and build solidarity. As a viewer watching this spectacle from the comfort of my living room, I felt I belonged to this important event.

And isn't this precisely what our lives are all about? Faith is that gift which cries out for belonging. In this often abrupt and unmanageable world where our hearts seem adrift in chaos, we long for safety and refuge. We long to gather under the weepie, in the longhouse, in a friend's living room, a sanctuary somewhere. We long for meaning; we long to belong. As depicted in the painting of Creation by Michaelangelo which adorns the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, God, the Creator Spirit, has continually reached out to us. Time and time again we see a God head over heels in love with us. It was a love bound for consummation, intimacy, union. And the form it took was the Incarnation — God loved us so much that he became one of us; indeed, it is the ultimate compliment.

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